

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-07

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2008 PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

UNCLAS HALIFAX 0046

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TAGS: PINT CA

SUBJECT: NEW BRUNSWICK OPPOSITION LEADER QUILTS

REF: 77 HALIFAX 0512

1. ROBERT HIGGINS (L), OPPOSITION LEADER IN NB LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, HAS RESIGNED THAT POST AS A RESULT OF HIS DISSATISFACTION WITH THE FINDINGS OF CHIEF JUSTICE CHARLES J A HUGHES IN HIS REPORT ON ALLEGATIONS BY THE OPPOSITION LEADER OF IMPROPRIETIES BY THE PC PARTY IN THWARTING AN RCMP INVESTIGATION OF THE PARTY S FUND-RAISING ACTIVITIES. HIGGINS WILL RETAIN HIS SEAT AS AN MLA.
2. ANNOUNCING HIS RESIGNATION, HIGGINS SAID HE COULD NOT REMAIN AS LEADER IN VIEW OF THE CLEAR-CUT LANGUAGE OF THE REPORT, HIS STRONG FEELINGS ON THE ISSUE, AND HIS DEEP RESPECT FOR THE SYSTEM. HE STANDS BY HIS ALLEGATIONS BUT DECLINED TO SAY WHETHER HE WILL PURSUE THEM WHEN THE LEGISLATURE OPENS IN THE SPRING.
3. ANOTHER LIBERAL MLA, JOHN TURNBULL(SAINT JOHN HARBOUR), HAS RESIGNED HIS SEAT AS A RESULT OF THE OUTCOME OF THE HUGHES INQUIRY. HE SAID

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HIS RESIGNATION WAS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE AND FOLLOWS THE TRADITION OF THE BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM. WITH RESPECT TO HIGGINS' ACTION, TURNBULL SAID, "I THOUGHT HE DID THE RIGHT THING. I WAS PROUD OF HIM." TURNBULL SAYS HE DOES NOT INTEND TO RETURN TO POLITICS.

4. INTERIM LIBERAL PARTY LEADER MLA NORBERT THERIAULT HAS CONVENED CAUCUS TO SELECT NEW OPPOSITION LEADER. AMONG NAMES SUGGESTED AS THE NEW LEADER IS THAT OF ROMEO LEBLANC, FEDERAL MINISTER OF FISHERIES.

5. COMMENT: LIBERAL PARTY INFORMANT IN NOVA SCOTIA COMMENTED TO REPORTING OFFICER THAT HIGGINS' RESIGNATION AS NB OPPOSITION LEADER MAY HAVE BEEN NOTEWORTHY AS AN EXAMPLE OF NOBLESSE OBLIGE BUT WAS DAMN POOR POLITICS. INFORMANT SAW NB POLITICAL TIDE RUNNING GENERALLY IN THE LIBERALS' FAVOR, WITH THE TORIES DEFINITELY ENDANGERED IN UPCOMING GENERAL ELECTION THIS YEAR. NOW, WITH HIGGINS PUBLICLY SETTING SUCH STORE BY THE OUTCOME OF THE HUGHES INQUIRY AND WITH HIS BIG GESTURE OF RESIGNATION, NB LIBERALS ARE AT LEAST TEMPORARILY IN DISARRAY WHILE THE POSITION OF PREMIER HATFIELD AND HIS FELLOW PC'S IS IMMEASURABLY STRENGTHENED. END COMMENT. MOORE

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